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COMMONWEALTH LIFTS DROUGHT ADVISORY

Abundant Winter Precipitation Allows Return to Normal Conditions

BOSTON, MA – The Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force has recommended that the Drought Advisory level for four of the Commonwealth's six water resources management regions be lifted. The entire state is now considered to be in the normal range. The Advisory, which covered all of Massachusetts, except for Cape Cod and the Islands and Berkshire County, had called on state, regional and local officials to be vigilant, especially concerning fire danger and water supply for firefighting.

Issuance of the Drought Advisory came at the October 10, 2007 meeting of the Task Force at the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) headquarters in Framingham. The second of five levels of drought conditions outlined in the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan (Normal, Advisory, Watch, Warning and Emergency), an Advisory indicates a level of dry conditions that warrants closer tracking by agencies at all levels of government. Of particular concern was the fire danger for the late fall and winter, when fallen leaves provide abundant fuel and dry soil conditions could allow fires to burn deep and spread rapidly to large areas.

The Drought Advisory required the Drought Management Task Force to begin meeting on a regular basis to more closely assess conditions across the state, coordinate dissemination of information to the public, and help state, federal and local agencies coordinate any responses that may be needed in the future. Lifting of the Advisory came at yesterday's Drought Management Task Force meeting.

There has been a dramatic increase in statewide precipitation, culminating in February 2008's statewide average of 8.7 inches of precipitation, about 270% above normal, making it the wettest February on record. Other key areas of concern such as ground-water levels, stream flow, and water supply reservoir levels are now at or above normal ranges. In order for the Task Force to make the determination to return to normal status, ground water levels must be in the normal range, and either three months of precipitation must be above normal or long-term cumulative precipitation (4-12 months, depending upon the time of year) must be above normal.

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The Drought Advisory is based on thresholds contained in the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan, a blueprint developed by the Drought Task Force to guide state activities in response to droughts and extended periods of dry weather.

Although fall and winter months are not peak water use periods, they are typically the time when reservoirs and groundwater are recharged. Development of a snowpack over the winter months, and subsequent spring snowmelt is part of the typical cycle that helps restore water tables on an annual basis.

The Drought Management Task Force recommends that normal water conservation efforts continue to sustain public water supplies and protect environmental resources. Homeowners and facilities with private wells are also advised to undertake conservation measures to assure the continuity of their own supplies.

The Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force comprises representatives of the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Agricultural Resources, Department of Public Health, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Weather Service, Massachusetts Water Works Association, and the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards.

MEMA is the state agency responsible for coordinating federal, state, local, voluntary and private resources during emergencies and disasters in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MEMA provides leadership to: develop plans for effective response to all hazards, disasters or threats; train emergency personnel to protect the public; provide information to the citizenry; and assist individuals, families, businesses and communities to mitigate against, prepare for, and respond to and recover from emergencies, both natural and man made. For additional information about MEMA go to the MEMA website at www.mass.gov/mema.